

Forest Plan Amendment to Add Three Monitoring Questions to the Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy

**Decision Memo
Chugach National Forest
September 2010**

INTRODUCTION AND LOCATION

The Revised Land and Resource Management Plan Record of Decision for the Chugach National Forest was signed on May 31, 2002. A primary goal of the Revised Forest Plan is to provide for the sustainability of the resources of the Chugach National Forest, while directing the coordination of multiple uses, such as outdoor recreation, timber, wildlife, fish, water wilderness, and minerals. To accomplish this goal, the Revised Forest Plan utilizes an array of land allocations ranging from allowing no resource development to allowing substantial resource development. It establishes a set of standards and guidelines that ensure that management objectives for these land allocations are met. Recognizing that conditions on the Forest do not remain static, the Revised Forest Plan also contains a monitoring and evaluation plan and identifies additional information needs.

Chapter 5 of the Revised Forest Plan provides for three types of monitoring: 1) implementation monitoring to determine if the direction in the Revised Forest Plan is being followed; 2) effectiveness monitoring to verify if standards and guidelines are achieving the desired results; and 3) validation monitoring to determine if underlying assumptions remain valid.

The planning area encompasses the entire 5.5 million acre Chugach National Forest located in Southcentral Alaska (see Figure 1). The Forest is the second largest in the National Forest System and is subdivided into three administrative units: the Glacier, Seward, and Cordova Ranger Districts. The Forest has three distinct geographic areas: the Kenai Peninsula, Prince William Sound, and the Copper River Delta.

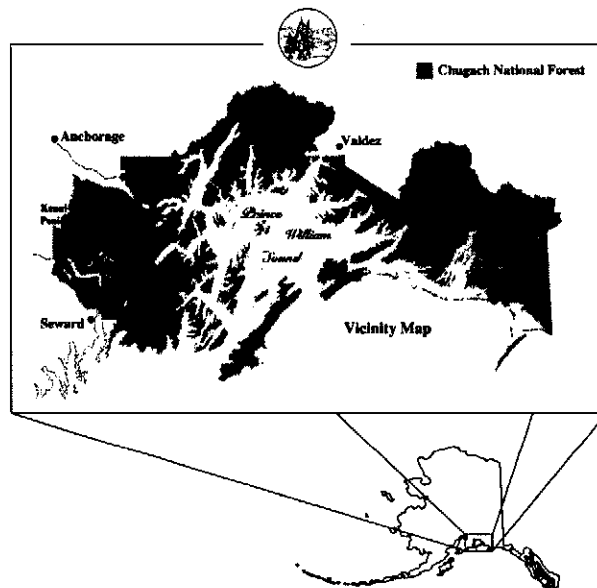


Figure 1. Vicinity Map

PURPOSE AND NEED, PROPOSED ACTION

During the development of the Revised Forest Plan's Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy (Chapter 5), the monitoring question for Mountain Goat, a management indicator species (MIS) species, was inadvertently omitted. Additionally, the Chief's decision regarding the appeals made on the Forest Plan resulted in the need to add two additional questions to the Forest's Monitoring and Evaluation

Strategy; one to monitor the effects of OHV use on the soil resource and the second to monitor air quality changes over time.

The Forest Service is proposing to amend the Chugach National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan by adding three questions to the Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy (Chapter 5). The proposed action would ensure that the guidelines and other management direction found in the Revised Forest Plan will minimize the risk to mountain goat viability. Additionally it will allow the Forest to address environmental concerns identified through the appeal process and documented in the Chief's appeal decision.

DECISION AND RATIONALE

It is my decision to amend the Revised Forest Plan by adding three monitoring questions to the Forest's Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy. The implementing regulation for NFMA prescribes the use of MIS, whose response to land management activities can be used to predict the likely response of other species with similar habitat requirements. Five MIS (black oystercatcher, brown bear, Dusky Canada goose, moose, and mountain goat) were identified in the Forest Plan. The quantity and quality of mountain goat winter habitat is thought to be a limiting factor for mountain goats in Southcentral Alaska. Forestwide guidelines identify specific distances to be maintained between activities and goats and their critical habitat. These guidelines and other management direction will minimize the risk to mountain goat viability resulting from helicopter-recreation activities. Forest Plan monitoring activities will assess the effectiveness of these guidelines.

The mountain goat is a MIS on the Chugach National Forest. During the development of the Forest Plan, mountain goat monitoring questions were inadvertently left out of the Forest's Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy. The following question regarding mountain goats is being added to the Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy to comply with the 1982 planning regulations concerning MIS (36 CFR 219.9), and to meet the intent of the general MIS monitoring question on page 5-8 of the Forest Plan. The Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy will be revised to add the following:

General Monitoring Question: What are the population trends for mountain goat and the relationship to habitat?

Measurements of Interest / Specific Monitoring Questions: Population trends; habitat characteristics and management. / What is the population trend of mountain goats on the Chugach National Forest? Are the effects of management (concentrated human use) as predicted in the plan? Are the effects of management (helicopter overflights) as predicted in the plan?

Suggested General Methods: Use data from ADF&G surveys to determine population trends; To address effects of management (concentrated human use), the degree of overlap between goat habitat and concentrated human use will be determined using a winter recreation model and a goat habitat model; To address effects of management (helicopter overflights), this evaluation will consider literature, datasets and modeling.

Category / Frequency of Collection / Frequency of Evaluation / Precision & Reliability / Estimated Annual Cost: Baseline / Every 3 – 5 years / 5 years (evaluate all three questions at the same time) / A / \$10,000

On June 21, 2004, Gloria Manning, Reviewing Officer for the Chief, rendered a final decision on the appeals received on the 2002 Chugach National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Revised Plan). The Chief upheld the Regional Forester's decision to adopt the

revised plan, but instructed the Regional Forester “to clarify access management direction relevant to cross-country travel in the Copper River Delta area. The clarified direction must provide for monitoring OHV effects on the soil resource including areas where OHVs are allowed to operate across the landscape, such as those identified in the Revised Plan on the Copper River Delta geographic area.” Additionally, the Chief agreed that more detailed air quality analyses need to be made so air quality changes over time can be detected.” As a result of this appeal decision, I am authorizing the addition of two monitoring questions to the Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy, Chapter 5 of the Revised Forest Plan. The Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy will be revised to add the following two questions:

General Monitoring Question: What is the effect of summer OHV use on soils and/or vegetation where OHV use is allowed? Are management practices (standards and guidelines, BMPs, mitigation measures) effective in maintaining soil quality and in meeting the severity limits for selected soil properties?

Measurements of Interest / Specific Monitoring Questions: Aerial extent of detrimental soil compaction, displacement, erosion, loss of SOM, or other as appropriate to the activity (physical, biological, chemical). / How many acres of ground disturbance occurred from Forest activities; How are the disturbed areas distributed over the Forest; How has the disturbance changed the character of the affected area?

Suggested General Methods: Summarize the aerial extent of detrimental soil compaction, displacement, severe burning, and altered wetness resulting from ground disturbance activities that have occurred on the Forest in the past year. The Protocol Strategy, including conceptual design, statistical design, unit sampling design, soil disturbance classes, field survey methods, and soil and site indicators will follow the USDA, Forest Service “National Soil Disturbance Monitoring Protocol, Vols. 1 and 2” (2009).

Category / Frequency of Collection / Frequency of Evaluation / Precision & Reliability / Estimated Annual Cost: Implementation and Effectiveness / Annual / 5 years / A / \$10,000

General Monitoring Question: Are Forest management actions contributing to changes in air quality on the Forest?

Measurements of Interest / Specific Monitoring Questions: Time-averaged carbon monoxide and fine particulate concentrations. / What is the potential that winter snowmachine use and its associated activities are causing violations of Alaska State air quality standards in areas of the Chugach National Forest where winter motorized use is the highest?

Suggested General Methods: Cooperate with the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation to quantify levels of carbon monoxide and fine particulates in the air at high-use sites on days during the winter when motorized use is the highest. Compare measured levels to Alaska State air quality standards.

Category / Frequency of Collection / Frequency of Evaluation / Precision & Reliability / Estimated Annual Cost: Effectiveness / Every 3 – 5 years / Every 3 - 5 years / A / \$12,000

The addition of these three questions are corrections to the monitoring program. A revised Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy is attached (Appendix A).

FINDINGS AS REQUIRED BY LAW, POLICY AND REGULATION

The Forest Service manages the Chugach National Forest in conformance with many federal laws. In this section I consider each of the major laws involved in this decision.

Finding of Consistency with the National Forest Management Act (NFMA)

This Forest Plan amendment is consistent with the 1982 NFMA implementing regulations. The authority for using the 1982 regulations is included in the transition provisions of the 2000 regulations, as amended. The 1982 regulations specify a number of requirements that guide Forest Service planning. Based on my review of the interdisciplinary analysis for this amendment, I find that the amendment is consistent with the standards and guidelines of the Chugach National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan, and is therefore consistent with the National Forest Management Act. The Forest Plan Amendment resulting from this decision complies with each of these management requirements.

The implementing regulation calls for fish and wildlife habitat to be managed to maintain viable populations of existing native and desired non-native vertebrate species in the planning area (36 CFR 219.19). This decision is not expected to adversely impact the population viability of any wildlife species.

Finding of Consistency with the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA)

Section 810(a) of the ANILCA requires that an evaluation of subsistence uses and needs be completed for any federal determination to “withdraw, reserve, lease, or otherwise permit the use, occupancy or disposition of public lands.” On Chugach National Forest System lands, the Forest Plan ROD requires that the use of snowmobiles, motorboats, and other means of surface transportation traditionally employed for subsistence purposes by local residents continue pursuant to ANILCA; and this decision will not limit, in any way, the access of subsistence users to their resources. In accordance with ANILCA 810, I find that this decision will not affect access for subsistence activities on Chugach National Forest System lands or result in a significant possibility of a significant restriction on subsistence use of National Forest System lands.

ANILCA, Section 1110(a) states that “the Secretary shall permit, on conservation system units, national recreation areas, and national conservation area, and those public lands designated as wilderness study, the use of snowmachines (during periods of adequate snow cover, or frozen river conditions in the case of wild and scenic rivers), motorboats, airplanes, and non-motorized surface transportation methods for traditional activities (where such activities are permitted by this Act or other law) and for travel to and from villages and homesites. Such use shall be subject to reasonable regulations by the Secretary to protect the natural and other values of the conservation system units, national recreation areas, and national conservation areas, and shall not be prohibited unless, after notice and hearing in the vicinity of the affected unit or area, the Secretary finds that such use would be detrimental to the resource values of the unit or area. In accordance with ANILCA 1110, I find that this decision will not affect special access or access to in-holdings.

Finding of Consistency with the Endangered Species Act (ESA)

This decision will have no effect on threatened, endangered, or proposed species.

Finding of Consistency with All Applicable Federal Laws and Regulations

Based on my review of the actions associated with this amendment and all applicable specialists' input, I find that this amendment is consistent with the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, National Forest Management Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act. Therefore, I find that the Forest Plan Amendment to add three additional monitoring questions is consistent with applicable Federal laws and regulations.

Finding of Consistency with the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as Amended

The Coastal Zone Management Act requires the Forest Service, when conducting or authorizing activities or undertaking development directly affecting the coastal zone, to insure that the activities or development be consistent with the approved Alaska Coastal Management program to the maximum extent practicable. I have determined that the proposed activities are consistent with the Alaska Coastal Management Program to the maximum extent practicable.

Finding that No Extraordinary Circumstances Exist

This activity falls within a category of actions for which a project or case file and decision memo are required, which normally do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment and, therefore, may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment.

Based on my review of (1) the addition of these three questions to the Revised Forest Plan as proposed by this amendment; (2) the lack of environmental consequences (because there would be no ground disturbance) documented above; (3) the consistency of this amendment with applicable laws, regulations, and management direction; (4) the non-jeopardy to endangered or threatened species or heritage resources; and (5) the absence of adverse effects to extraordinary circumstances; I find that this amendment is not significant in either context or intensity (40 CFR 1508.27 and that no extraordinary circumstances would be adversely affected with this amendment (FSH 1909.15). I also find that this amendment would produce no adverse environmental effects, individually or cumulatively, on the physical, biological, or social components of the human environment.

Finally, I find that this amendment is not an action that approves a project or activity, it does not command anyone to refrain from undertaking projects or activities, nor does it grant, withhold or modify contracts, permits or other formal legal instruments. Therefore, I find that the Forest Plan amendment to add three monitoring questions to the Forest's Monitoring Strategy is categorically excluded from analysis in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) (40 CFR 1508.4 and 36 CFR 220.6) as codified at 36 CFR 220.6(e)(16). This category allows the categorical exclusion for land management plans, plan amendments, and plan revisions developed in accordance with 36 CFR 219 et seq. that provide broad guidance and information for project and activity decisionmaking in a National Forest System unit.

Public Review Period and Objection Process

Amendments to Forest Plans that are categorically excluded from analysis in an EIS and documented in a decision memo are subject to a 30-day objection process. A legal notice was published in the Anchorage Daily News, the newspaper of record for the Chugach National Forest, on August 8, 2010. The 30-day objection process ended on September 7, 2010. No objections

were received.

Amendment Implementation

This decision shall be implemented in accordance with Forest Service regulations contained in 36 CFR, Part 219.32(d); the Forest Supervisor, may not approve this proposed amendment until the reviewing officer has responded to all objections. As no objections were received, this decision can be implemented immediately.

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this proposed amendment or for information on the objection process, contact Sharon Randall; phone number (907) 743-9497; email address srandall@fs.fed.us.



MARIA LISOWSKI
Acting Forest Supervisor

9/30/10

Date